

Free Public Library of Bloomfield, New Jersey
90 Broad Street, Bloomfield

Janet F. Melvain
Librarian

Phone BL 2-3383

The Library

in

World War II

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THE LIBRARY IN WORLD WAR II

There has never been a war in which books have played so important a part as in World War II. As far back as May 10, 1933 Hitler showed his fear of the effect of books on his plans for world-wide conquest by having a public bonfire of them in Berlin. The Japanese too, realized their importance for a shipment of \$50,000 worth of technical books, purchased in this country, was found and confiscated just after war was declared. Millions were shipped to our armed forces all over the world at the request of the Army and Navy leaders who knew that reading was necessary for instruction and was a most powerful morale builder.

These facts emphasized in a most dramatic way what libraries everywhere felt - that the public libraries of America had a specific part to play in the general war effort with a responsibility and a duty all their own. So, although the war work of the Bloomfield Library was not spectacular, we believe it played a valuable part in our own local war plans.

Even before the United States entered the war, in November 1940, we distributed lists of "Essential Books for Workers in The National Defense Program" to local industries - in two cases at the request of the company, supplying enough copies for general distribution to the employees. In 1941 and 1942 the money given us by the Friends of the Library Association was spent for new technical books so much in demand by the workers in the factories.

Special lists of books were prepared and distributed to different groups and to the library patrons generally. These lists were on

"democracy", "Civilian Defense", "South America; Neighbor or Relation?", "American Spirit in Books", "Americans All" and similar subjects.

Exhibits in the library were equally varied, including, "Books That Have Changed the Modern World", "Defense Work of the Essex County Vocational Schools", "Books Banned in Nazi Germany" and exhibits showing flags, photographs, etc. of countries in the group of United Nations. Special exhibits were prepared for the Community War Chest Drives, and at all times space was devoted to government posters advertising War Bonds, Army and Navy Recruiting, Victory Gardens, etc. and many government pamphlets were distributed.

Early in 1942 the Trustees of the library offered the use of the auditorium, free of charge, to the Civilian Defense Council and to the Red Cross for any of their classes or meetings. Consequently, several First Aid courses, staff assistance courses, and meetings of Canteen workers were held in the library. The Air Raid Precautions Staff also used the auditorium regularly for many months.

Although library hours had to be curtailed to save fuel, an attempt was made to give the greatest service to our borrowers by remaining open on Saturday and closing for a whole day in the middle of the week. The summer that gas rationing put a halt on pleasure driving, the staff volunteered to work Sunday afternoons so that the library could be open from 2:30 to 6:00 during July and August. We also opened a summer branch in Brookdale - with the cooperation of the North End Improvement Association which lent us the use of its club house. This branch was open two half-days a week and was especially enjoyed by the children of that section.

The Children's Librarian spoke on "Books About America" at several of the schools in connection with the Schools at War Program.

She also gave a talk on story-telling to those taking the course for Volunteer Child-Care Aides, and the library provided a special shelf of books for the use of this group.

Realizing that many residents of Bloomfield, Glen Ridge and Montclair could not visit their own libraries because of the gasoline shortage, the libraries of these three municipalities entered into an agreement for inter-changeable service. In this way, an adult could borrow books from whichever of the three libraries was most convenient for him to visit in the course of his daily travels. This service has proved so helpful in war-time we hope to continue it.

All members of the staff joined the pay-deduction plan for the purchase of war bonds thus entitling the library to a Minute-Man banner and a certificate. They represented the library on the Mayor's Post-War Advisory Committee, the Committee on Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, the Committee on Rehabilitation (later the Civilian and Veterans Service Committee) and on the Adult Education Committee.

In connection with the rehabilitation work, the library set up a special section of books on vocational guidance, and with the help of a gift from the Civilian and Veterans Committee were able to add extensively to the regular collection of books in this field. These books have proved of great value to returning servicemen.

However, the major war activity of the library was its participation in the National Victory Book Campaign sponsored by the American Library Association, American Red Cross and the United Service Organizations. On January 22, 1942 the librarian, who was chairman for the local drive, called a meeting in the library auditorium to which thirty local organizations sent representatives. The purpose of the drive was explained

and plans for carrying it out discussed. All organizations offered their heartiest cooperation and many of them, besides collecting books from their own members, furnished very valuable assistance in the actual work involved.

The Bloomfield Branch of the American Association of University Women undertook the responsibility of sorting the books collected. Various groups and individuals secured deposit stations throughout the town, provided cartons for the books and made the necessary signs and posters. The Kiwanis Club took charge of collecting the books from these stations and bringing them to the library. The Girl Scouts made a house-to-house canvas for books, and the Boy Scouts assisted in the collections. Every public and parochial school served as a collection center and arrangements were made to have books left at the fire houses and some of the churches. The Royal Theater showed a trailer at every performance for a week, distributed book marks and made a place in the lobby for books. Many of the local stores, besides displaying posters about the drive, added a line to their advertisements in the local paper urging people to contribute. The library also carried a large advertisement in the Independent Press for the same purpose.

Although the National Campaign closed in 1943, the library continued to accept books for distribution to our service men and women until the end of the war. Altogether nine or ten thousand books were collected, more than six thousand of which were sent to various camps, hospitals, etc. as designated by the central committee. Discarded books and magazines were sold and \$18.00 in cash sent to the National Book Campaign Committee toward expenses.

One of the staff not only worked with the Independent Press on local publicity, but served as State chairman of publicity.

It is not necessary to list the individual war work done personally by the members of the staff, although all made their contribution, attending first aid classes, doing Canteen work, acting as blood donors and knitting. As a library our war motto was "Service Through Books" and in the post war era, we believe this service will prove to be of even greater value.

Jfm:vp

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